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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000357

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TAGS: [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [CM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMCIT CAUGHT IN ESCALATING POLITICAL
VIOLENCE IN CROSS RIVERS STATE

Classified By: Consul General Donna Blair, Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On August 25 an American academic doing research in Cross River State was beaten and then detained for six hours by Nigerian police. The incident occurred against a background of increasing political violence in Cross River State. A traditional ruler in Calabar, Edidem Bassey Ekpo Bassey II, claims that the violence is carried out by "private armies" created and nourished by the state government, and argues that there is a danger that these "militants" could provoke an unwanted war with Cameroon. Post believes the violence is better characterized as efforts to maintain a one-party state in Cross River State. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On August 25 Ivor Miller, an American historian from Boston University, was beaten and detained by Nigerian police when he attempted to photograph a police invasion of the home of a Calabar traditional ruler, Edidem Bassey Ekpo Bassey II. Miller had been present at the Bassey residence when ten armed men attempted to storm the Bassey residence. (Note: Bassey is one of two contenders for the position of Obong of Calabar, a powerful traditional title.) The attack was repelled by Bassey's guards, who chased the attackers away, capturing one in the process. According to Miller, the police arrived an hour later to free the captive, and in the process they beat one of Bassey's guards severely, vandalized the house, and arrested Miller, Bassey's wife and school-aged children, guards, domestic staff, and a doctor who was attending the captured man. Miller claims he was beaten and then detained for six hours before being released. Miller says the doctor was also released shortly after he was. Bassey's brother-in-law, Uwem Udoh, told Poloff on August 28 that Bassey's children had also since been released but that his wife was still detained. Miller is continuing his academic research in Cross River State and plans to depart Nigeria September 4; he will meet with Poloff in Lagos prior to departure.

¶3. (C) Although press reports characterized the attack as factional strife over the title of Obong, Udoh and Miller both claim that the attack on Bassey was politically motivated and sponsored by officials in the Cross River State government. Bassey made himself unpopular with the current government of Cross River State by publicly alleging that the

state government was not properly elected, urging the federal government to dissolve it, and challenging the re-election of governor Liyel Imoke (Note: Imoke was re-elected governor on August 23 in fresh elections ordered by a federal court.) In a letter written to the National Security Advisor, Bassey further accused the state government of creating and nourishing "private armies," which systematically intimidate opposition figures, and cited the assassination of Calabar Chief Magistrate Maria-Theresa Nsa and the complete destruction of the villages of Ikot Ana, Ebijakara and Obomitiat as examples. Bassey expressed his belief to Poloff on August 20 that these "private armies" might get out of control and provoke conflict with Cameroon.

¶4. (C) Miller corroborated Bassey's account of political violence to Poloff on August 20 five days before his arrest by Nigerian police. He reported that he had personally seen and photographed two victims of what he said was political murder. He said the men were cut to pieces because they opposed the state government, and offered to provide copies of the photographs.

¶5. (C) Comment: Cross River State is essentially a single-party state, with the ruling People's Democratic Party using the familiar tricks of political violence and vote-rigging to tighten its grip on power. The deployment of armed groups is particularly disturbing; such groups often take on a life of their own, and the violence spirals out of the control of its creators. While Miller's arrest came about because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, it nevertheless served to highlight the deteriorating security

LAGOS 00000357 002 OF 002

situation in Cross River State. End Comment.
BLAIR